

## **CORPORATE WORSHIP VARIOUS PASSAGES**

### **Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors here, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

### **Topic Introduction**

Each week, we usually preach *expositional* sermons through one passage of Scripture, but today, I'm doing something that I don't think I've ever done before: I'm repurposing a *topical* sermon looking at various passages on corporate worship that I preached four years ago.

Why am I doing this? Because if you've been in our church over the last few years, you may have noticed changes to our corporate worship.

- We have a Scriptural call to worship.
- We sometimes confess our faith using the words of a historic creed (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16).
- We spend more time in prayers of praise, confession, petition, and thanksgiving.
- We read Scripture from the opposite testament but from the same theme as the sermon text.
- We have songs from different eras of church history.
- We tilt the chairs so that we can see and sing to one another even as we sing to our God.
- We have service guides to aid us throughout the service, helping us to sing confidently, encouraging us to take notes during the sermon, and providing guidelines for self-examination during the Lord's Supper.

And in all these changes, it may feel that our convictions have changed, but I want us to know that that is *not* the case. These are all the same biblical convictions that were already present four years ago when I first preached this sermon, and over the years, we have been aiming to align our *forms* to better match our biblical *convictions* regarding corporate worship.

<pause>

Before talking about *corporate* worship though, we need to first understand what *worship* is in general.

"Worship is our response to what we value most."<sup>1</sup> Or to put it another way, "Whatever is worth most to you is what you worship."

It's "whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, 'If I have *that*, *then* I'll feel my life has meaning, *then* I'll know I have value, *then* I'll feel significant and secure.'"<sup>2</sup>

That could be money, beauty, power, intellect, security, status, approval, pleasure, people, or something else.

Understood this way, you could say that all a human being ever does is worship because we're all living *for* something and we're all driven *by* something; all our thoughts, desires, choices, actions, and words are all *responses* to what we value most.

And the pull of our flesh, the world, and the devil are constant and incredibly strong, so God has prescribed *corporate* worship—the regular worship gathering with fellow members of our local church—to be one of the primary means by which he pulls us back (so to speak) and pulls us together to himself.

---

<sup>1</sup> Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah, 2003), 2. For a thoroughly biblical definition of worship, Jonathan Gibson ("Worship On Earth as It Is in Heaven," in *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, ed. Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney [Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press], 2) writes: "Worship is the right, fitting, and delightful response of moral beings—angelic and human—to God the Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator, for who he is as one eternal God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and for what he has done in creation and redemption, and for what he will do in the coming consummation, to whom be all praise and glory, now and forever, world without end."

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Penguin, 2009), xx.

In the Bible, worship has generally been understood as *both* “corporate” worship and “all of life” worship.

Corporate worship refers to the worship of God in the context of the body of believers (or the gathered church) and “all of life” worship refers to every other context for worship of God in the life of an individual believer.<sup>3</sup>

Corporate worship is our *gathered* response as a *church* to God’s revelation of who he is and what he has done for us in Christ, and “all of life” worship is how we respond to who God is and what he has done for us in Christ *individually* Monday through Saturday in all our thoughts, desires, choices, actions, and words.

But today, we’re going to focus specifically on the “corporate” aspect of worship, particularly the *weekly* assembling of the church—the “com[ing] together as a church” for weekly corporate worship, like we’re doing right now in this Sunday Celebration.<sup>4</sup>

Now that I’ve explained *why* I’m repurposing this sermon on corporate worship, let’s get right into it.

### Sermon Introduction

Imagine that you’re on a basketball team. You wear a basketball jersey, you carry around a basketball, you shoot free throws by yourself at a nearby basketball court, but you never *gather* to practice with other teammates and you never *gather* to play games together. In other words, you *never* assemble. Are you really part of a basketball *team* then? Are you really *experiencing* basketball the way it’s supposed to be?

No! Basketball is a *team* sport, so even though you can and should practice on your own, you can’t say you’re on a basketball *team* unless you regularly *gather* with your *teammates*. And in fact, you can’t *really* experience basketball the way it’s supposed to be played unless you’re playing as a *team*.

In a similar way, yes, we should worship God with our hearts and with our whole lives *as individuals*, but we must never forget that we’re also called to worship God *together* with his people—as a *church*.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, we see this one phrase repeated over and over again to the Corinthian church: “when you come together.” It’s repeated *five* times in the span of 18 verses. And in 1 Corinthians 11:18 (cf. 1 Cor. 14:23), what’s meant by that becomes *explicitly clear*.

1 Corinthians 11:18 = ... when you come together **as a church**...

In its original language, the word “church” literally means “assembly,” so we cannot have an *assembly* (or a church) that never *assembles*.<sup>5</sup> And in fact, when Christ saved us, he saved us into a *family* with other brothers and sisters, into a *flock* with other sheep, into a *body* with other members. In other words, worshiping God is a *team* sport. He designed worship not only to be *individual*, but it’s ultimately meant to be *corporate*.

In the new heavens and new earth, we don’t see isolated *individuals* worshiping God by themselves, but we see a great *multitude* that no one can number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping God in *one* voice (Rev. 7:9-10).

### The One Thing

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, “Worship Under the Word,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 26, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, we see a pattern of local churches meeting *weekly* on “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10) or “the first day of the week,” which is Sunday and which celebrates the day of Jesus’ resurrection and him first appearing to his disciples (Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19-23; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). In *creation*, there is a Sabbath, and in the *new creation* in Christ, there is still a Sabbath. And so, throughout the history of the Church, God’s people have assembled *weekly* to observe a Christian Sabbath to rest from routine employment and to worship God together as a church in corporate worship. For a summary of the “when” in corporate worship, see J. Ligon Duncan III, “Foundations for Biblically Directed Worship,” in *Give Praise to God*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas and J. Ligon Duncan III (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 62. For a brief biblical theology of Sabbath, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Sabbath As Rest and Hope for the People of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *One Assembly* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 18-19.

Let's come together as a church to *bolster* our worship of God.

When I say "bolster," I'm not talking about a pillow (or a "*guling*"), but I mean "bolster" as in to strengthen, reinforce, boost, fortify, renew, support, sustain, help, and increase. And I just couldn't find another word that encompassed all of that.

So let's come together as a church to *bolster* our worship of God.

### Scripture Introduction

If you have a Bible, I encourage you to go to the various passages that will be referenced because it will be helpful for you to see the contexts that they're found in, and for you, as a responsible listener, to ensure that I'm not misusing any of these texts.

### Overview

We'll look at corporate worship in three parts:

- I. *Pictures* of the church in corporate worship
- II. *Practices* of the church in corporate worship
- III. *Purposes* of the church in corporate worship

### I. Pictures of the church in corporate worship

The Bible gives many different metaphors or pictures for the church.<sup>6</sup>

I've already mentioned some of them, but we'll focus on two pictures of the church and how that affects our understanding of corporate worship.

First, the church is...

#### A. The Family of God

Ephesians 2:19 = So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God**,

In Christ, we are members of the household of God; we are *family*.

But if we think about the context of this passage, this really shouldn't be taken for granted.

Right before this, the apostle Paul references the *hostility* that existed between the Jews and Gentiles (or non-Jews) and, in verse 14, how Christ has "broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" between them.

In the first century, the differences and hostilities between Jews and Gentiles were almost on every facet; they had *historical baggage*, *ethnic* prejudice, *religious* hostilities, and *cultural* separations. It seemed like *nothing* in this world could have brought them together.

But "in himself" (v. 15), "through the cross" (v. 16), "through him" (v. 18), Christ killed their hostility towards one another in order to make them one *family* in Christ.

So when we say that we're "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ, it's not just some Christian jargon or spiritual synonyms for "men" and "women," but that family reality ought to be *expressed* in our depth of love and commitment towards one another, even to those who are so different than us, because of our common bond in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> D. J. Tidball ("Church" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. [Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2000], 410) notes the following imagery for the church: "The church is the temple of the living God and so should be neither destroyed nor defiled (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16–18; Eph. 2:21). It is a new \*humanity, taking its origin from the second Adam rather than the first (Rom. 5:12–17; Eph. 2:15). It is a body where each member is significant and which must keep closely in touch with its head (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–31; Col. 1:18). As a body it can grow and mature (Col 2:19; Eph 4:16). It is the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) where certain rules of conduct apply. Further images speak of the church as God's field (1 Cor. 3:9), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), an army of the Spirit (Gal. 5:25 – 6:5), the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15)."

<sup>7</sup> Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 25–28, Kindle.

So how should that affect our understanding of corporate worship?

First, when we gather, we *remember* that Christ *died* to make us *family* with one another. When we look around and see our brothers and sisters in Christ, we begin to realize how *precious* is this family to *Christ*—and so how precious this family ought to be to *us*! Christ didn't just die for *me*, but Christ died for *us* (Rom. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:10). Gathering together takes us out of our own self-focus to remind us that God is not only *my* Father but *our* Father.

Second, when we gather, we *reveal* or *testify* to the supernatural power of the gospel to bring such different people into one family. The world can explain communities that are built around common life stage, common socio-economic status, common educational background, common passions and causes, and common life experiences. But when there's a visible community of such *different* people who may have even had former hostilities, the world *cannot* explain it. The only commonality that should be able to explain our *whole* community is our common commitment to Christ and our faith in the gospel.

Third, when we gather, we *strengthen* our identity and relationships *as family*. For example, in my family, even though life can get very busy, we've made eating family meals together a priority. Sometimes my children don't want to join us for dinner because they want to keep drawing or doing whatever they're doing, but then I remind them, "We're a family, so we're going to eat dinner together as a family." And when we eat together, we wait for each other, we pray together, we talk with one another, we laugh together, and we enjoy one another. Family meals *strengthen* our *corporate* identity as a family and strengthen our *relationships* with one another as a family. And so, as a *church*, our corporate worship gatherings *also* remind us of our *corporate* identity and *strengthen* our relationships with one another as a local family of God.

<pause>

So the church is the family of God, and the church is...

## B. An Embassy of the Kingdom of Heaven

An embassy "represents one nation inside another nation. It declares its *home nation's* interests to the *host nation*, and it protects the citizens of the home nation living in the host nation."<sup>8</sup>

So, for example, the American embassy in Jakarta represents the US in Indonesia; the American embassy speaks on behalf of the US to those in Indonesia and protects US citizens living in Indonesia.

Now, in light of that, think about what God's Word says in...

Philippians 3:20 = But **our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

In Christ, our citizenship is not *ultimately* in Indonesia or in the US or in some other country, but "our citizenship is in heaven"; we belong to a kingdom *not* of this world (John 18:36).

And the New Testament calls us "*ambassadors* for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20), so local churches are *embassies* (or outposts) of the kingdom of heaven.

So how should that affect our understanding of corporate worship?<sup>9</sup>

First, we gather as *ambassadors* and not *consumers*. We don't come to consume an experience or to be entertained or to criticize different aspects of the corporate worship, but we come together to *honor* our King and make him known. We come to be *reminded* together of the heavenly *country* that we belong to, the *King* we swore allegiance to, and the *mission* our King has given to us.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 27.

<sup>9</sup> The following three lessons are largely adapted from Matthew Merker, *Corporate Worship* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021), 35-38. See also Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 27-30.

Second, we gather to communicate God's declarations (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:18-20). Just as an ambassador speaks on behalf of the country that he represents, the church also speaks on behalf of the heavenly King we represent.

- When we confess our sin in corporate prayer, we declare God's judgment that sin deserves his wrath.
- When we rejoice in song together for the forgiveness we have in Christ, we declare God's acceptance of us in Christ.
- When we sit under the reading and preaching of God's Word, we declare that God's Word has absolute authority in our lives and that we're called to respond to it.

Third, we gather to exemplify the culture of God's kingdom, which is *counter*-cultural to the kingdoms of this world. Our times of corporate worship as a church are gatherings of "sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet. 2:11; cf. 1:1), who know that this place is not where our true and ultimate citizenship is, but we are just pilgrims passing through this foreign land to our heavenly home. We sing our national anthem in our songs of worship. We teach our constitution in the preaching of God's Word. We issue passports to new citizens of God's kingdom through baptism. We enjoy a foretaste of the future national feast in the Lord's Supper. The gathering of God's people is a *preview* (though flawed) of what the kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth will look like. It's the *trailer* of the movie to come.

<pause>

So how should we *respond* to these *pictures* of the church in corporate worship?

We ought to commit to being a meaningful member of a local church.

As we've been talking about the weekly assembling of the church—the "com[ing] together as a church" for weekly corporate worship—and how that *pictures* us as the family of God and as an embassy of the kingdom of heaven, it should become increasingly clear to us, then, that committing to be a meaningful member of a local church is one of the most fundamental applications.

So if you're *not* a member of a local church, or if you *are* but you don't regularly assemble with them for corporate worship, then we need to honestly ask ourselves, "Why not?"

Perhaps you think that you can be a Christian and *not* belong to a local church. Perhaps you feel that having a personal relationship with God is all you need.

But the New Testament simply doesn't have any paradigm for Christians who are *not* meaningfully part of local churches; if Christ *died* to include us into his family, then we shouldn't act as if we're spiritual orphans without a family.

If you want to learn more, I'd encourage you to check out our membership classes that will continue next Sunday at 2pm. You can take the classes in any order, so don't worry if you're jumping right into the middle.

<pause>

If you're *already* a member of our church, commit to be a *meaningful* member. Membership is not simply signing a piece of paper, or *mere* attendance in corporate worship, but it is *engaging* in committed relationships with your family members and fellow citizens of God's kingdom.

I've noticed that some of us have a tendency to just slip in late after the service has started and slip out early after the service has ended. If that's you, you're missing a huge part of what corporate worship is about.

- Can I encourage you to come a bit early and stay a bit afterwards to get to know other members here?
- Can I encourage you to join some of us for dinner afterwards?
- Can I encourage you to extend or accept invitations to grab coffee or hangout with other members in our church during the week?

- Can I encourage you to ask one another for biblical counsel regarding tough situations at work or with parenting or in singleness, instead of trying to figure it all out on your own?

If you're a parent, I want to especially challenge you to think about how you can include your *spiritual* family in your *nuclear* family. I know it's tempting to think that you're all on your own, that you need to figure it out by yourself, and just try to learn from the so-called "experts" on social media and the internet. But God has given you a spiritual family who have covenanted alongside you, as our Membership Covenant says, to "endeavor to make disciples of those within our influence in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of family, friends, and all those around us." In essence, we're here to help you raise a family. We're here so you don't have to figure everything out on your own. We're here to love your kids and to multiply the godly examples they have in their lives.

It's these kinds of committed relationships—this kind of *meaningful* membership—that accentuates the glory and goodness of how God designed these *pictures* of the church in corporate worship.

<pause>

So first, *pictures* of the church, and second...

## II. Practices of the church in corporate worship

Everything we do—all of our *practices*—in corporate worship must clearly be *warranted* or *grounded* in Scripture. This is often called the "regulative principle"—God's Word *regulates* what we do when we gather as a church to worship him.<sup>10</sup>

If we came together for corporate worship, I *hope* that we'd all feel that something was wrong if we gathered around a rock concert or contemporary dance instead of gathering together around God's Word. There's nothing wrong with rock concerts and contemporary dance, and if you're a musician or dancer, those *may* be ways that you *personally* express worship to God. But just because it may be how you *personally* worship, once we start making those things elements of our *corporate* worship, we're binding *every* individual to take part in things that *you* may like but that *Scripture* doesn't necessarily warrant us to do when we're *gathered* altogether.

When we gather to worship, there shouldn't be anyone asking to themselves, "Is this ok to do?" And if anyone ever *does* ask that question, we should be able to point to Scripture and say, "We do this when we gather because God's Word says we should do this when we gather."

If someone asks and all we can say is, "Well, we just thought it was a good idea to do," that's hugely problematic. If we take a cursory glance at Scripture, we quickly see that what people think is a good idea is often *disastrous*. People thought making a golden calf (Exod. 32), offering unauthorized fire (Lev. 10), and touching the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6) were all good ideas, but they led to *death* in every instance.

---

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the theological foundation for the regulative principle, we may briefly survey "the doctrine of God, the Creator-creature distinction, the idea of revelation, the unchanging character of the moral law, the nature of faith, the doctrine of carefulness, the derivative nature of the church's authority, the doctrine of Christian freedom, the true nature of biblical piety, and the reality of the fallen human nature's tendency to idolatry" (J. Ligon Duncan III, "Foundations for Biblically Directed Worship," in *Give Praise to God*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas and J. Ligon Duncan III [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003], 51). First, since the nature of God determines the way we should worship him (John 4:24), how God reveals himself in Scripture is the ground for how we are to worship him. Second, because of "God's transcendence and the inability of our finite minds to fathom him" (54), we are utterly reliant on his revelation to know how to properly worship him. Third, worship entails a call-and-response dynamic, and God's revelation reveals both the call to worship and the proper response of worship that God desires. Fourth, the second commandment "forbids not only the making of idols, not only the use of images in the worship of the one true God, not only the introduction of things forbidden into the worship of God, but also of anything not commanded or warranted" (55). Fifth, faith is "a believing response to God's revelation," so given that "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb. 11:6) and "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23), God cannot be pleased by worship that is not an obedient response to his revelation, for that is by definition not of faith. Sixth, because God is a consuming fire, we ought to be careful how we worship him. Seventh, the church has no power to authorize the elements of worship but can only administer what God has revealed in his word. Eighth, to require in corporate worship what God has not required forces a person to sin against his conscience. Ninth, true piety manifests itself in humbly and carefully obeying exactly what God says in his word (Isa. 66:1-4; Deut. 12:29-32; 1 Sam. 15:3-22). Tenth, in our fallen state, we tend towards idolatry rather than true worship, so we cannot trust our intuitions regarding how to worship but need to be instructed by God's word.

In our fallen state, we all tend towards *idolatry* rather than true worship, so we cannot trust our intuitions regarding how to worship, but we need to be instructed by God's Word.

So, rather than being *restrictive*, the regulative principle actually protects the consciences of *all* those who are present; though some elements may be done differently, everyone can take comfort in knowing that we're *only* participating in elements that Scripture *warrants* for us to do.

So what are those elements (or practices) of corporate worship that Scripture warrants?

In short, we are to *read* the Word, *preach* the Word, *pray* the Word, *sing* the Word, and *see* the Word (in the ordinances).<sup>11</sup>

With that said, let's get into the first of these five elements of corporate worship.

## A. Read the Word

1 Timothy 4:13 = Until I come, **devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture**, to exhortation, to teaching.

God's Word needs to be *read* when we gather together as a church because we cannot truly *know* God without him *revealing* himself to us, and he's done that in his Word. We cannot *respond* to God in worship unless he first *speaks* to us. And so, though our order of service varies slightly from week to week, our entire corporate worship has elements of Scripture reading woven in as a kind of *call* and *response*.

- As we read Scripture to start our corporate worship, it's God who is *calling* us to worship and we *respond* in song and prayer.
- We read Scripture from the opposite testament but from the same theme as the sermon text, and God *calls* us to confess our sin and our faith in Christ, and we *respond* in prayer.
- We read a Scriptural assurance of pardon, and then we *respond* in song and prayer.
- We read a Scripture passage that will then be expounded in the sermon, and we *respond* to God's Word in prayer and song.
- And God gets the final word in our corporate worship with the Scriptural benediction, blessing us as we then scatter throughout the week.

What does it imply, then, when God's people gather and do *not* read God's Word?

- It implies that we don't live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).
- It implies that what we have to say is more important than what *God* has said.
- It implies that we value what we do more than being reminded of what *God* has done.

Don't ever underestimate the power of the *reading* of God's Word (cf. Heb. 4:12).

So read the word, and second...

## B. Preach the Word

2 Timothy 4:1-2 = I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Timothy is called to preach *the word*. He's given the *substance* or the *content* of his preaching. He's *not* to preach his own ideas, what people want to hear, or what's trending in culture. He's to faithfully preach *the word*.

In other words, if you're a mailman, you don't deliver your *own* letters, but someone else's; if you're a waiter, you don't mess with the food as you take it from the kitchen to the table.

---

<sup>11</sup> We could also add offering (1 Cor. 16:2), but the point is that God's Word *prescribes* what we are to do in our corporate worship, and so, everything we do in corporate worship *must* have biblical warrant.

That's why we do our best to give our church a regular diet of *expositional* preaching where "the point of a biblical text is the point of the sermon, applied to the life of the congregation."<sup>12</sup> We *expose* the text; we *explain* what it means in its original context and how that applies to us. The authority of God's Word rests not in what we have to say or what the *congregation* wants to hear, but it rests on what *God* has already said in his Word.

That means that, as you listen to the preaching of God's Word, keep your Bibles open, look at the verses in context, and make sure that the preacher is being faithful to what God's Word actually says. That is of the utmost importance.

In general, if the congregation walks away from the sermon only remembering stories, illustrations, and examples, and cannot remember what the text was about, I have failed as a preacher. If members start quoting things that I have said instead of what Scripture says, then I feel like I have failed as a preacher.

Especially in times of trials and temptations, what I hope comes to mind is not what I have said, but what *God's Word* says. That's what is of the utmost importance, and that's what I hope our congregation remembers.

I pray that our congregation would have a deep hunger for God's Word faithfully preached, no matter who it comes from.

So read, preach, and third...

### C. Pray the Word

1 Timothy 2:1 = First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

When God's people gather, we are to lift up all kinds of *prayers* for all kinds of *people*.

God's people are not just called to pray *personally* and *privately* but also *corporately* and *publicly*. We are to be a "house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7; Matt. 21:13).

Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, authors of *The Deliberate Church*, write this:

You are either teaching the members of your congregation how to pray biblically, teaching them how to pray poorly, or teaching them not to pray at all, simply by how much time you carve out in the service for prayer and how you fill that time.<sup>13</sup>

During our corporate worship, we set aside time for extended corporate prayers. We usually have:

- a prayer of praise (where we praise God for who he is),
- a prayer of confession (where we confess our sins and our confidence in Christ),
- a pastoral prayer (where we pray for our church and members) and prayer of petition (where we ask God to do what is in accordance with his Word),
- and a prayer of thanksgiving (where we thank God for what he has done).

Sometimes, those get moved around, like today where the prayer of confession is part of the Lord's Supper; and sometimes, we'll have other kinds of prayers as well—like...

- a prayer of invocation (where we ask for God's blessing as we gather to worship him)
- or a prayer of lament (where we pray our pain to God, which leads us to trust him).

We may not always directly quote Scripture, but we strive to have our corporate prayers be *saturated* with Scripture and *conformed* to God's priorities set out in Scripture. We want our church to learn how to pray God's Word and how to pray in light of what *God* values as we all hear and join in those corporate prayers week after week.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Dever, quoted in Jonathan Leeman, *Word-Centered Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody, 2011), 103.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 83.



From our prayers, we want our congregation to know that we do not worship a small, tribal God who only cares about you and our church, but we worship an infinite God who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, who upholds the universe by his very word, who is sovereign over every governing authority and every hair that falls to the ground—and yet, who came as the person of Jesus Christ to live, die, and resurrect to redeem sinners like us.

How mighty and matchless is our God! How holy and gracious and praiseworthy is our God! That's who we want our corporate prayers to help us to see!

So read, preach, pray, and fourth...

#### D. Sing the Word

Colossians 3:16 = Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, **singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

So *how* are we to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly? Not just teaching and admonishing, but also *singing*!

Singing is one of the ways that we *own* and *affirm* God's Word. When we respond in song to God's Word, we are in essence saying, "Yes, I believe and affirm these truths with all that I am." And it's not just *intellectual* agreement but singing engages our *emotions* and *affections* and aligns them to God's Word.

The "you" in Colossians 3:16 is *plural*, so it's not just addressed to individuals but to a *body* of believers—to the collective *members* of a church. So again, singing is not something we just do personally and privately, but it's corporate and public.

And we should sing songs that *conform* to God's Word.

Listen to what one Christian writes about the power and usefulness of his church's songs in his own followership of Christ; he writes this:

When I look at my prayers, and I get the feeling that my words aren't even going past the ceiling, and I'm distracted, and there's so much sin, and my prayers are so feeble, and only minutes have gone by at this point; I could remind myself of Hebrews 4:14-16, and Christ's role as High Priest, but what a comfort it is to hum...

"Before the Throne of God above,  
I have a STRONG and PERFECT plea  
A great High Priest whose name is Love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me!"  
[From "Before the Throne of God Above"]

Or when I'm wondering if I'm a Christian at all, thinking, "How is someone like me actually going to make it into heaven? I'm so weak! I have nothing good; even when I do good, it stinks, and even my faith seems too small!" Or when I'm anxious, or that heavy feeling in my chest hits me, I might have the clear head to rehearse 2 Cor. 5:21 or remember the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. But when I'm crying and too tired to think clearly, what a comfort it is to sing to myself and to God...

"Jesus paid it all!  
All to Him I owe  
Sin had left a crimson stain  
He washed it white as snow!"  
[From "Jesus Paid It All"]

Or if my mind gets me thinking that "Christ couldn't (or doesn't) care about me; I'm on my own," or even that "Christ will save me, but He doesn't love me in particular," the words of

Christ in John 14 or 17 will often show me the truth. But when my emotions won't budge, I can sing to my heart...

"Though Satan should buffet [or to strike repeatedly],  
though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded [or paid attention to] my helpless estate [or condition],  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul."  
[From "It Is Well"]

God gives me a song from [my church] for every doubt and doubt feeling in my head, and this makes them sweet to me! And I don't have to second guess those feelings of comfort, because I can be confident they are grounded in the truth of Scripture, and that the Spirit is the One impressing these things on my soul! What a weapon against the lies in my heart.<sup>14</sup>

You may have noticed that we've been introducing some older hymns in our church. We don't *only* sing older hymns, but we're looking for the best songs that we can find from *all* eras that reflect a fuller spectrum of the Christian experience—from sorrow for sin to joy in salvation, from the happy anticipation of heaven to the pain of trials.

Because songs are so memorable, they have the power to *form* us—to *shape* us. And so, we want to sing songs that fill our minds and hearts with God's character, that form our worldview by God's truth, and that teach us the meaning and implications of the gospel for our lives and our world.<sup>15</sup>

So read, preach, pray, sing, and lastly...

## E. See the Word

There are two ordinances (or sacraments) that Jesus commanded his church to practice until he returns—baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The ordinances have been called "visible words" (Augustine) because they make *visible* the *word* of the Gospel.

In baptism, as a believer is immersed *under* water, it symbolizes his union with Christ in his death and burial; and as he emerges *from* the water, it symbolizes his union with Christ in his resurrection and the new life he now has in Christ (Rom. 6:3-4).

In the Lord's Supper, the broken bread and the poured-out wine symbolize that Christ's body was broken and his blood was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

In the ordinances, we *see* the gospel (so to speak). And God gives us these ordinances because he knows the *weakness* or *frailty* of our faith. We *need* to be reminded of his covenant with us in Christ in more *tangible* ways than only hearing; he wants us to see, smell, touch, and taste his word (if you will) through baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And so, as often as we have baptism and the Lord's Supper as part of our corporate worship, it *supplements* and *confirms* the gospel of Jesus Christ held out to us in God's Word in *tangible* ways.<sup>16</sup>

And by God's providence, we'll partake of the Lord's Supper today as a response to the preaching of God's Word.

<pause>

<sup>14</sup> Dan Bellamy, email correspondence to Mark Dever around 2012 regarding music at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C., shared with me by Mark Dever in 2024, slightly revised for punctuation and grammar; a portion of the email is also available at Mark Dever, "In Praise of Low-Budget, Non-Professional Music Ministries," 9Marks, August 23, 2016, <https://www.9marks.org/article/in-praise-of-low-budget-non-professionalized-music-ministries>.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 85.

<sup>16</sup> J. Ligon Duncan III, "What does biblically-directed and informed public worship look like?" July 11, 2014, <https://ligonduncan.com/what-does-biblically-directed-and-informed-public-worship-look-like/>.

So *pictures* of the church, *practices* of the church, and third...

### III. Purposes of the church in corporate worship

Why does God gather us for corporate worship? In short, God gathers us for exaltation, edification, and evangelism.<sup>17</sup>

So first, God gathers us for...

#### A. Exaltation

To “exalt” someone is “to raise high,” “to elevate by praise,” or “to glorify” that someone (Merriam-Webster).

**Psalm 111:1** = Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, **in the company of the upright, in the congregation.**

**Psalm 149:1** = Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise **in the assembly of the godly!**

Throughout history, God’s people have exalted God in praise and worship *together* as an *assembled* people.

Can we praise and worship God *individually*? Yes, and we should! But the *whole* is greater than the sum of the parts.

After God brought the Israelites back from exile and they rebuilt the temple, this is how their worship of God is described in...

**Ezra 3:11, 13** = And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, **“For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”** And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid... **and the sound was heard far away.**

One Old Testament scholar comments that “The noise of temple worship was legendary.”<sup>18</sup>

What if our corporate worship of God could be described like that—where the sound of our praises to God were heard *far away* throughout the whole city? That our corporate worship of God was *legendary*?

But this isn’t just loudness for loudness’s sake, but God’s people always have a *reason* to exalt him. “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward [his people].” In light of the good news of Jesus Christ, we *know* that is *absolutely* true of God—he is good, his steadfast love towards us endures forever. So how can God’s redeemed people *not* exalt him with all that we are?

Imagine the thundering sound of a sports stadium where the whole crowd is cheering and roaring in one voice for their home team as they’ve just won an exciting game. Everyone is jumping up and down, hugging strangers next to them with tears running down their faces, and shouting and singing in one voice as they celebrate *together* their team’s victory.

How much *more* unity and joy we should express as we sing of *Christ’s* victory over sin and death—not with *strangers*, but with our brothers and sisters in Christ! How much *more* beautiful is the sound of redeemed sinners rejoicing in their Savior!

So first, exaltation, and next, God gathers us for...

#### B. Edification

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Merker, *Corporate Worship* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021), 61-75.

<sup>18</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC 20 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 525.

To “edify” means “to build up.” One more picture of the church that’s helpful for understanding this purpose of edification in corporate worship is that the church is the *body* of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:27 = Now **you are the body of Christ** and individually members of it.

And as *individual* members of a local body of Christ, we’re called to “build up” the *whole* body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

In fact, two chapters later, the apostle Paul keeps repeating that term for “build up” over and over again.

1 Corinthians 14:5, 12, 26 = ...so that the church may be **built up**... strive to excel in **building up** the church... Let all things be done for **building up**.

In other words, we *need* one another to *be built up* and to *build up*.

That means that we ought not to cut ourselves off from the body; a finger cut off from the body doesn’t survive very well.

That also means that there should be no anonymous or passive members of this body or in our gatherings. Our corporate worship is not simply about God and *you*, but it’s about God and *us*. It’s about God and *all* the members that make up the body of Christ.

So, you should get to know other members and you should make yourself known to them. We all have an important role to build up others in the body—even if it seems as insignificant as simply *singing loudly*.

Ephesians 5:19 = addressing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

Biblically, the most important instrument in corporate worship is not the guitar, not the keyboard, not the cajon, not any of the voices on stage, but the most important instrument is the *congregational* voices.

One of the greatest joys in the service for me is turning around and looking at the rest of the congregation singing these biblical truths that we hold fast to. And the more you know the congregation and you see them singing these songs of biblical substance, it is so edifying. When you know that they’re going through affliction and you see them singing about drawing near to Christ in the midst of their affliction, that *warms* the soul and that *edifies* the congregation.

Yes, we sing to *exalt* our God, but we also sing to *edify* one another. So, as you have the lyrics and music in front of you, don’t be hesitant to sing, don’t sing just loud enough to hear yourself, but sing loudly so that you can *edify* your brothers and sisters around you.

And I’d encourage you to look around and recognize that you’re not just having a private worship experience, but you’re reminding one another of these great gospel truths as we’re all singing them out together in one voice.

So whether it’s singing aloud, getting to know others, serving in formal or informal ways, we *all* have a role to build up others and to be built up by others in the body of Christ.

So exaltation, edification, and third, God gathers us for...

### C. Evangelism<sup>19</sup>

The New Testament *expects* that unbelievers will be *present* in our times of corporate worship, that they would be *convicted* in their hearts, and that they will begin to *worship* God as new believers.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Matthew Merker, *Corporate Worship* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021), 68-75. See also Tim Keller, “Evangelistic Worship,” January 1, 2001, <https://redeemercitycity.com/articles-stories/evangelistic-worship>.

1 Corinthians 14:23-25 = If, therefore, **the whole church comes together** and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, **and an unbeliever or outsider enters**, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, **he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.**

The context of this passage is addressing the use of spiritual gifts for the building up of the church in corporate worship, and the point here is that whatever we do in corporate worship should be *comprehensible* to unbelievers.

Our corporate worship is not *catered* to unbelievers, but it should be *comprehensible* to unbelievers.

If people don't understand what we're saying or doing, they'll walk away saying, "These folks are out of their minds." But if people can understand what we're saying and doing, our hope is that they will be cut to the heart and join us in true worship of our God.

That means that our corporate worship should be *comprehensible* and *saturated* with the gospel of Jesus Christ from beginning to end.

In our reading, preaching, praying, singing, and practice of the ordinances, we hear and see:

- How God created everyone and everything and how we are ultimately accountable to him,
- How we've all rebelled against God and are deserving of his just judgment,
- How Jesus Christ became our substitute in his life, death, and resurrection to take our punishment for sin and to give us his righteousness,
- How all who repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior can be forgiven their sins and have eternal life,
- And how all of creation is awaiting Jesus' return to usher in the new heavens and new earth where there will be "all of life" worship and corporate worship of God with all of God's people forever without sin.

*Believers* need to be continually built up by these gospel truths, and *unbelievers* need to hear and understand these gospel truths in order to come to saving faith (Rom. 10:13-17).

And if you're here today, and you're *not* a believer in Jesus Christ, we're glad that you're here. And I hope you're hearing these gospel truths throughout our corporate worship. All of us—you, me, and everyone around us—are *sinners* who will one day stand accountable before our holy Creator for every thought, desire, choice, action, and word. And God will either rightly *condemn* us for our sins or he will rightly *forgive* us our sins because of our faith in Christ who has *already* bore the punishment for our sins on the cross (1 John 1:9).

And if you're hearing and understanding that, and if you're convicted of your sin and your need for Jesus, then I *urge* you to *repent* of your sin and *believe* in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and I *invite* you to *join* in the worship of God together with his people.

I pray that you would do that today and that your life would never be the same.

<pause>

We gather for corporate worship as God's people, but we should always *desire* that God would *extend* corporate worship to *all* peoples (cf. Ps. 67:1-3).

<pause>

So we come to corporate worship for exaltation, edification, and evangelism.

Notice that there isn't another E for *entertainment* or *experience* as a purpose for God gathering us in corporate worship.

We don't come to corporate worship to be *entertained* by the music or the message or to *consume* an individual, private *experience*—preferring to have an extended “me and God” experience with eyes closed, lights dimmed, and music turned up, and ignoring everyone else around us.

Corporate worship is *not* a “put in your own private headphones” and have your own personal quiet time kind of experience. We don't come to be anonymous or passive. But we come to corporate worship to *exalt* God together, *build up* one another, and see the lost come to saving faith.

## Conclusion

As we close, since we just focused this entire sermon on *corporate* worship, I want to make sure we connect it back to “all of life” worship.

I alluded to it at the beginning, but “all of life” worship and corporate worship are actually *inseparable*.

A. W. Tozer, a former pastor in the US, writes this:

So I've got to tell you that **if you do not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week.** There is no such thing known in heaven as Sunday worship unless it is accompanied by Monday worship and Tuesday worship and so on....

We come into God's house and say, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let us all kneel before Him." Very nice. I think it's nice to start a service that way once in a while. But when any of you men enter your office Monday morning at 9 o'clock, if you can't walk into that office and say, "The Lord is in my office, let all the world be silent before Him," then you are not worshipping the Lord on Sunday. If you can't worship Him on Monday you didn't worship Him on Sunday. If you don't worship Him on Saturday you are not in very good shape to worship Him on Sunday.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, if we're not worshipping God in “all of life,” then it's unlikely we're actually worshipping him in our weekly corporate worship.

Why? Because “worship is our response to what we value most.”<sup>21</sup> And if we value *other things* more than God on other days of the week, then *those things*—rather than God—will be what our hearts value on Sunday.

If we're all honest with ourselves, we all struggle with that. So should we just stop coming together as a church for corporate worship then? Not at all! In God's good design, corporate worship is one of the primary means that God uses to *reorient* our hearts back to him.

As I talk to members in our church, I know that there are those who are struggling with idolatry of money and success, discouraged by relational conflicts, overwhelmed by caring for ailing parents and other family members, struggling to overcome temptations, battling anxiety and depression, or just feeling spiritually dry and disconnected.

I know that it's not easy to gather when we're going through those kinds of various trials, and I'm *not* saying that we should just suck it up and forget all that we're going through and just come. No, God designed corporate worship, so that we can come as we are—with all our struggles, discouragements, and weariness—and be filled in his presence as he dwells with his gathered people (Matt. 18:20). It is a primary means of grace for us in our followership of Christ.

When we come together as a church and we're reminded once again that...

- Christ has made us the family of God and an embassy of the kingdom of heaven;
- and as we're cut to the heart once again in the reading, preaching, praying, singing, and seeing of God's Word;
- and as we exalt him together, build up one another, and see the lost come to saving faith...

<sup>20</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: WingSpread Publishers, 1997), 9, 24, quoted in “Tozer on Leadership,” June 16, 1941, <https://www.biblegateway.com/devotionals/tozer-on-leadership/1941/06/16>.

<sup>21</sup> Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah, 2003), 2.

...as we join together in corporate worship, God *reorients* our hearts back to him; he *enables* us once again to see and respond to the worthiness of God in Christ together as a church.

And so, corporate worship *fuels* our “all of life” worship, and our “all of life” worship *fuels* our corporate worship.

Every time we gather together for corporate worship, it is a rehearsal (so to speak) or a glimpse of that final day in Revelation 7, which is on the front of your service guides, where we will be included in that great heavenly assembly with all the saints from every nation, tribe, people, and language, worshipping God in one voice, shouting, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:9-10).

Every time we gather, may we long for that day together and may we help one another persevere to the end until we reach our heavenly home together.

Let's pray.